



# The Clerk's Black History Series

## Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



## Raye Jordan Montague

(January 21, 1935 – October 10, 2018)

**“1st Woman Professional Engineer Recipient of the Society of Manufacturing Engineers Achievement Award”**

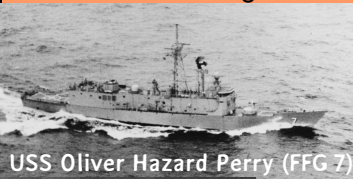
**“Created the First Computer Generated Draft of a U.S. Naval Ship”**



**Raye Jordan** was born on January 21, 1935, to Flossie and Rayford Jordan in Little Rock, Arkansas. Raye was a gifted child who excelled at math and science. At the age of seven, she visited a museum with her grandfather and saw captured German ships from WWI. She knew then she wanted to design ships. She graduated from Merrill High School in 1952 and even though she wanted to study in engineering, colleges in Arkansas would not allow African-Americans or anyone of color to pursue the degree at the time. Instead, she attended Arkansas Agricultural, Mechanical & Normal College (now University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff) and graduated in 1956 with a bachelor of science degree in business. Raye is quoted as saying she graduated on Tuesday and on Wednesday, she went to Washington, D.C. to take her resume to the U.S. Navy.

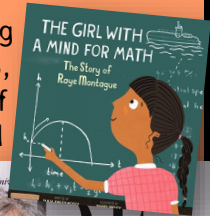
She soon began her career with the Navy in Carderock, Maryland, as a digital computer systems operator. Her desk was next to the department's UNIVAC I computer, and from observation only, she learned how it worked by watching her male, Ivy League colleagues. One day, when all of the engineers were out sick, Raye, used her keen memory and began running the computer. She was soon promoted to work on engineering projects, but only for the night-shift. Having no public transportation to get to work in the evening, Raye purchased a 1949 Pontiac and taught herself to drive. She continued developing her computer programming skills, and progressed, despite the daily obstacles.

In 1971, Raye was asked to design a Naval ship. Although it normally took two years to produce a ship's design on paper, Raye was given a month to complete the task. Eighteen hours and 56 minutes later, Raye Montague produced the first draft design for the FFG-7 frigate (the Oliver Hazard Perry-class ship). In honor of her breakthrough in the ship design process, Raye was awarded the Navy's Meritorious Civilian Service Award in 1972. Raye's design went on to become the lead ship of the class of guided-missile frigates - USS Oliver Hazard Perry (FFG 7). The Oliver Hazard Perry frigates replaced WWII's destroyers.



USS Oliver Hazard Perry (FFG 7)

Raye Montague spent 50 years in Washington, D.C., and 33 years working for the Navy and was honored many times throughout her career. In 1978, she became the first female professional engineer to receive the Society of Manufacturing Engineers Achievement Award. In 1988, she received the National Computer Graphics Association Award for the Advancement of Computer Graphics. When she retired in 1990, she was given a flag that flew over Washington, D.C., along with a certificate saying that it had been raised in her honor. When the movie *Hidden Figures* was released, Raye's name emerged again as another example of an African-American woman in technology whose work was critical to our country's advancement and success. In 2013, she was inducted into the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame and the Naval Sea Systems Command honored her as its own "hidden figure" in 2017.



**ENGINEERED  
for GREATNESS**

In 2018, Raye Montague was inducted into the Arkansas Women's Hall of Fame and in the same year, a children's book called *The Girl with a Mind for Math*, a short story of her life, was published.

Raye remained very active with her sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, and continued working with many civic organizations until her death on Oct. 22, 2018, in Little Rock, Arkansas.